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Aspects of Didactic Communication in Primary School

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Abstract

Communication - definition. Functions of communication: cognitive, expressive, conative, poetic, referential, metalinguistic, phatic. Didactic communication - a form of educational communication meant to transfer specific contents in order to generate an act of learning. Didactic communication – a complex and complete process, integrating verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal communication. Focused upon correctness of verbal communication (oral and written), present r primary school curriculum shows little concern for nonverbal and paraverbal communication. Downwards and upwards communication, lateral or horizontal communication. Teaching methods analyzed from this perspective. Teaching as a process or enculturation enhanced by didactic communication. Barriers to communication – inappropriate educational environment versus flexible environment

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Modern pedagogy considers the educator - educated relationship as being a very complex one, implying an ongoing dialogue between the two factors involved in the educational process, mutual communication which involves all sides of their personality. School experience shows that students learn and train themselves the way they are led by their teacher. Student’s personality is influenced by the teacher’s personality, one’s spirituality feeds from the other’s, making the interpersonal and multispiritual dialogue necessary and pedagogical interaction possible and able not only to ensure the informational-operational dimension of knowledge transfer, but also its human and

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psychosocial dimension reflected by the common growth and coevolution of the partners in interaction: the primary school teacher and his students.

All these goals cannot find effective practical application without good knowledge of the methods and techniques of communication, without acquiring, during initial teacher training for primary education, efficient communication skills that take into account the communication mechanisms and functions. In real communication situations, according to Roman Jakobson's conception, the six functions which he defined, and which we briefly present in the following section of this paper practically coexist in any communication. The difference is given only by their hierarchy of importance.

The corresponding function of focusing the message upon its sender is the expressive or emotive one. Its purpose is to express the sender's attitude towards the content of the message, his affective state, his feelings, moral values, cognitive abilities and his culture. The expressive function refers to the ability of the teacher as the sender of the message to express his position concerning the information he conveys verbally, nonverbally and paraverbally. Linguistic markers of the sender's subjectivity are also markers of the expressive function of communication. Interjections have an important emotional value, some verbal forms (the conditional mood), epithets and a wide range of stylistic means as well as nonverbal and paraverbal means of communication are used to express our subjective reactions when in contact with a certain reality: superlatives, repetitions, inversions, exclamations, interrogations, facial expressions, body postures, rhythm, intonation etc.

The conative function (also called persuasive or rhetorical) refers to the necessity of persuasive effect that the message must have on the recipient, in our case primary school student, from whom it is intended to achieve a certain type of answer (verbal, behavioral). The conative function aims at inciting the student to action or termination an action by the use of orders, encouragements, pleadings, interdictions, etc. The imperative mood is specific to the conative function. Its grammatical expression is marked by the second person of the pronoun and of the verb, by the vocative of the noun, and by the imperative of the verb, imperative and exclamatory sentences, positive and negative; exclamatory / interrogative intonation also characterizes the statements whose primary function is centered on the recipient.

The communication function corresponding to the context is the referential, denotative or informative function. It is focused upon the referent/receiver of the message or the subject of the communication and upon the situational or contextual framework in which the communication process takes place. Referential function transmits information about the real or imaginary world, refers to the context and establishes the referent. It can be denotative or cognitive, having in view information, linguistic and extralinguistic context, social, cultural communication. Markers of referential function are greeting formulas which show the relationship between sender and receiver, their status, various, so-called deictic, adverbs of place and time.

Metalinguistic function occurs whenever need arises in communication to draw attention to the code used. It aims at correct and complete understanding of the message and it requires interventions to verify the use and understanding of words and verbal expressions, their meaning, the collateral implications of the signs of the code. Explanatory periphrases specifying the way the meaning of the term should be understood, gestures or tones that indicate to the receiver the key in which he must decode the message, all these belong to the sphere of metalinguistic function.

Phatic or interactional function has as a purpose to establish and maintain contact between transmitter and receiver, the control of the proper functioning of the communication channel. Phatic function refers to the characteristics of the means of communication and the control of its correct functioning. Phatic signals that accompany interpersonal communication can be verbal confirmations or head movements, especially eye movements which always reconfirm the maintaining of the contact. On the objective, concrete plan, phatic function check the functionality of the channel through control questions and on the subjective plan, and it checks the receptor attention, the degree of understanding of the message,

Poetic function is centered on the message; it measures its originality and unicity, its degree of expressiveness. It is centered upon the form and not upon the contents of the communication. Poetic language emphasizes how someone speaks, unlike scientific language which focuses upon what that person says. The figures of speech are usually the markers of the poetic function. Poetic function does not appear isolated in the text; it is combined with other functions of communication.

Communication is defined as the art of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another, as the process of meaningful interaction among human beings. Didactic communication is a form of educational communication through which contents specific to various disciplines/objects of study are transmitted in order to generate an act of learning. Didactic communication can be defined as an instrumental communication directly involved in supporting a systematic process of learning, designed and carried out for the accomplishment of previously established educational objectives. According to the Dictionary of Pedagogy (Cristea, 2000), didactic communication can be considered ... "an axiomatic principle of educational activity which involves an educational message elaborated by the subject of education (the teacher), capable of causing a formative reaction of the object of education (the student) assessed in terms of internal and external feed back".

Didactic or pedagogical communication has some general features: it takes place between at least two typical partners: teacher-student, student-teacher, student-student; the message is designed, organized and logically structured by the educator, it is based upon educational objectives; it has a learning effect, seeking to influence, change and establish individual and group behaviors; it generates learning, education and development, while actively involving pupils in the communication process; it is complex, integrating different types of communication: verbal, paraverbal (emphatic), nonverbal (suggestive, descriptive, expressive gestures), written, visual, with informative function that stimulates independent thought, the observation spirit and creativity.

To succeed in achieving a successful educational intervention, primary school teacher must demonstrate mastery and exploitation of really effective teaching communication skills in order to form and develop these communication skills of the students during the instructive - educational process.. This implies that the educator himself masters these communication skills applied to a specific content. At the same time, he must not only know and understand the student, but also to be able to communicate to the student the way he understands him.

Didactic communication competences cumulate the whole range of personal skills: to know, to know what to do and to know to be and become. Therefore they involve all forms of communication and expression in general. We can talk about direct, linguistic, discursive, situational, paraverbal competences, and indirect, mediated competences: psycholinguistic, intellectual, social and cultural, informational. Communication competence in the didactic context means effectiveness in education.

We identify a communication system with two basic circuits in the classroom: a vertical circuit, establishing the link between the teacher and students and a horizontal circuit - reflecting the communication between students. Didactic communication involves both teaching strategies, the predominance of one in a certain context is justified by the objectives targeted, and the content transmitted, the teaching methods and means deployed. While the teacher sends messages, the recipient student builds, on the basis of the information submitted, his message which in part will be returned explicitly or through transparent mimics and gestures to the teacher. The latter does two actions, he speaks and listens to his students at the same time.

In its turn, the communication circuit involves a vertical downwards direction from teacher to student, an ascending direction, from student to teacher and a combination the two of them achieved through interactive methods of dialogue. Downwards communication is achieved by oral, expository communicative methods,: explanation, narrative or story, description, theoretical or logical demonstration, exposition, debate, instruction.

They already have an increasingly reduced rate in the transmission of knowledge than they used to have in the past when the Romanian system of education, including primary education, was based almost exclusively on expository methods of communicating knowledge, with a predominantly informative character. The expository-receptive model lost ground in favour of the intensification of the participative model, of the personal activity of the subjects of education, supported by active-participative methods.

Maintaining structured verbal communication methods is justified by the benefits that they conserved, although opinions were expressed by some specialists who challenge or even totally deny their use in teaching and they are considered outdated, incompatible with the requirements of modern education. "Through words, as symbols of concepts, which condense and express experience of human knowledge, the access road to the values of science and culture can be shortened. In a relatively short time, an explanation or a demonstration permits the transmission of large amounts of information. Moreover, one teacher for primary school can simultaneously train a relatively large number of students." (Cerghit, 2006)

As long as education remains a problem of communication, like any act of communication it will use the word, because the presentation of generally valuable realities needs conceptual integration through the word. Oral communication is characterized by flexibility, providing primary school teacher with the capacity of adapting himself to a specific topic, to students' level of knowledge, to the availabilities of time and material conditions of the teaching process.

Being centered upon teacher' activity, expository methods analyze the theoretical aspects of exposed content, citing facts and arguments, providing examples, formulating judgements of value conclusions, etc. The sore point of oral communication, its major disadvantage is the intense activity the teacher is involved in, in relation to the low participation of students during the teaching-learning process: the teacher talks, exhibits, while students listen, look, assimilate knowledge, becoming more a passive object of education and not its subject. In addition, under an almost continuous flow of knowledge following a one-way direction, the teacher-student relationship is one-sided and it provides little opportunity for personal interaction and effective feed back.

Renewal of these methods, their revaluation, is as much necessary as it is possible. The transformation of monologue into dialogue can be done through problematization of communication, formulation of problem-questions, analysis of problematic situations, case studies, issue of hypotheses, rhetorical interrogations. Instead of providing simple assertions, the teacher formulates questions, makes use of the pros and cons, and imagines a controversy with himself to which he will give the appropriate he answers. The comparison processes, the analogy, the thesis and antithesis, the parallel presentation, the use of statistical data accompanied by short explanations have an important contribution to the support of active educational activity.

Teacher-student relationship should be structured so that the student would dare act in the presence of the teacher, to work with him, to answer questions, ask in his turn questions, and formulate assumptions, opinions and personal interpretations. At key moments, the communicative relationship must be an interaction of two minds. Stimulating and maintaining student's interest during the lesson depends on a number of motivational factors, but also upon the use of subtle rhetorical means such as intensity of the voice, pauses, dramatization in rendering content that leads itself to nuanced interpretations.

Interactive methods of dialogue (heuristic conversation, discussion, brainstorming, problem solving, the focus-group method, the fishbowl method, the jigsaw, creative controversy, the cube, the talking hats method, the starburst, presuppose all these factors, essentially related to vertical communication in both directions.

On the other hand, integrated teaching, a complex method of teaching and learning which involves intradisciplinary approaches, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary ones, becomes effective if based on good knowledge and use of the methods and techniques of didactic communication. The continuous differentiation process of human knowledge, the emergence of new disciplines, in addition to those already existing in education curriculum has as the counterweight the integration tendency. The explosion of information leads not only to quantitative growth of knowledge, but also to essentiality and to integration. Integrated teaching experiences have a relatively rapid expansion, primarily because it addresses issues concerning the nature of science. The most serious steps of the integrated teaching method have been taken in preschool and primary education as a consequence of structuring primary school curriculum upon seven curricular areas which expresses the obvious intention of finding solutions for the integration of contents, but also due to insertion of the preparatory class in primary education..

Curricular areas represent groups of disciplines that share some common educational objectives. There is a dynamic equilibrium among the seven curricular areas, and the proportion between them changes depending on the age of learners and the specific curricular cycles. Integrative "themes" and "thematic guidelines" are used at the level of primary education, teachers having some freedom to choose or propose contents, At the same time the system of initial and continous training of teachers in Romania is still predominantly focused on teaching the disciplines of study separately.

Modern education tends to reach a harmonious combination of traditional practices that tend either to an excessive individualization of instruction, or to an exaggerated socialization of learning with active-participative methods, centered upon student, upon his activity and his engagement in the learning process, to keep a balance between individual activiy and group-work in order to achieve a reasonable balance between individually acquired experiences and those acquired through teamwork, to associate individual exercise with the exercise of interaction with others.

Viewed from communicational perspective in general, and from that of didactic communication in particular, all these tendencies have in common the necessity to combine teaching and learning methods with those related to communication, teacher's effort in this process resulting in potentially desirable academic success of the students in primary school. Inclusion of a didactic communication course in the initial curriculum for primary and pre-school pedagogy programme of study is another result, but also a natural necessity of the present tendencies in modern didactics.

For the communication to be effective, it is necessary to take into account all the factors involved. Communication barriers may arise from both the transmitter and receiver and the environmental context. There are a number of obstacles that can cause interruptions or alteration of the message. By communication barrier we mean anything, phenomenon or condition, that reduces the effectiveness and reliability of message transmission. Barriers of communication may be caused by the participants' mental/physical deficiencies, by different cultural patterns, by different or opposite previous experiences, by different strategies and roles, by prejudices, attitudes and perceptions, by false confidence, lack of credibility, negativism in attitudes and behavior, by different emotional load of the message transmission, by improper communication time interval, by peculiarities of the educational environment.

Teaching experience, and findings achieved during continuous training activities, especially during the special inspection for the first didactic degree, entitles us to pay special attention to the particularities of the educational environment. „Traditional”, rigid furniture still used in classrooms, both in rural and urban areas, which forces students to sit by twos at the desks, limits the possibilities of communication, especially those of nonverbal communication. It is of common knowledge that this type of horizontal communication may represent, in certain situations, over 50% of the communication process. Providing schools with flexible furniture that gives the teacher the possibility to ensure a normal process of communication becomes imperative. A flexible educational environment, designed to ensure equal opportunities for verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal communication between teacher and students, students and teacher and among students, that is, vertical and horizontal communication is of special importance.

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